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### **World Health Day — April 7, 1998**

“Invest in the Future: Support Safe Motherhood” is the theme in the United States for World Health Day, April 7, 1998. In the United States, this day will focus on the continued importance of maternal health and opportunities to improve this aspect of women's health. Although the risk for women dying from pregnancy has decreased substantially during the past 50 years, the maternal mortality ratio for the nation has not decreased since 1982 (1). Approximately 50% of pregnancy-related deaths remain preventable (2), and the extent of morbidity associated with pregnancy is often unrecognized.

Safe motherhood begins before pregnancy with healthy lifestyles that include good nutrition, physical activity, preconception care, and avoidance of harmful substances. Safe motherhood continues with planned pregnancies; early, quality prenatal care; knowledge of warning signs of problems; and the delivery of a healthy, full-term baby with the minimum of necessary interventions. Postpartum support for women and their families in a positive, nurturing environment also is important.

In 1998, in the United States, women can plan, carry, and deliver a pregnancy more safely than in the past. However, additional efforts need to be taken to make safe motherhood a reality for all women. Improved public health surveillance, prevention research, and prevention programs are needed to continue improving the health of women before, during, and after pregnancy and delivery. Examples include new surveillance methods to monitor and understand pregnancy complications; prevention research on the essential content of prenatal care; and prevention programs to ensure the adequate intake of folic acid by women of reproductive age to prevent neural tube defects (3).

The World Health Day Advisory Committee of the American Association for World Health coordinates World Health Day activities in the United States. Additional information about special events and resource materials about World Health Day 1998 are available from the American Association for World Health, 1825 K Street, N.W., Suite 1208, Washington, DC 20006; e-mail: [AAWHstaff@aol.com](mailto:AAWHstaff@aol.com); or from the World-Wide Web site: <http://www.aawhworldhealth.org>.

*Notices to Readers — Continued*

*References*

1. CDC. Differences in maternal mortality among black and white women—United States, 1990. MMWR 1995;44:6–7,13–4.
2. Mertz KJ, Parker AL, Halpin GJ. Pregnancy-related mortality in New Jersey, 1975 to 1989. Am J Public Health 1992;82:1085–8.
3. CDC. Recommendations for the use of folic acid to reduce the number of cases of spina bifida and other neural tube defects. MMWR 1992;41(no. RR-14).